Mental Activity is Key to Healthy Brain Aging, from the Harvard Men's Health Watch

*Mental exercise can keep thinking skills and memory sharp. The more challenging the task, the better.*

Boston MA (PRWEB) November 05, 2012 -- What's the best way to maintain mental skills and memory power as you get older? Just as exercise and physical activity prompt muscles to grow stronger, mental exercise keeps thinking skills and memory in tone, according to the November 2012 Harvard Men's Health Watch.

Does playing solitaire or Angry Birds qualify as mental exercise? "If it's too easy, it's not helping you," explains Dr. Anne Fabiny, chief of geriatrics at Cambridge Health Alliance and an assistant professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School.

Here are some of Dr. Fabiny's suggestions for exercising the brain:
Be a lifelong learner: Mental activity over a lifetime builds dense networks of connections between brain cells. Experience and learning build and maintain these connections. Learning something new keeps this "cognitive reserve" in good shape.

Strain the brain: When it comes to cognitive reserve, mentally challenging tasks have the biggest impact. Taking on an endeavor like learning a new language can be a difficult investment, but the payoff is greater.

Get uncomfortable: Getting out of the comfort zone from time to time challenges mental skills. An example of this is traveling to a never-before-visited city, which requires navigating unfamiliar surroundings.

Be social: Social isolation, aging researchers have discovered, puts people at risk of losing some of the brain reserves they have built up over a lifetime. Working as a volunteer in a social setting allows for contact with a variety of people and responding to new situations.

Read the full-length article: *"Healthy brain aging: No strain, no gain"

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